



NEWS RELEASE – June 2006

SEND IN YOUR WHALE AND DOLPHIN SIGHTINGS

Marine scientists are asking local people to send in reports of whales, dolphins and porpoises around the coast of Northern Ireland.

The Sea Watch Foundation, a dedicated conservation charity and research organisation, has recorded 28 species of marine mammals in UK and Irish waters. Recent sightings from Northern Ireland, however, have been few and far between, although porpoises and bottlenose dolphins occur regularly off the coast, and minke whales can be seen particularly in summer.

Dr Peter Evans, Sea Watch's research director, says: "We know that the northern Irish Sea is a good area for whales and dolphins, but we are very short of local observers to send us their reports.

"We urgently need people to get involved, especially sailors, wildlife enthusiasts, walkers and anyone who lives or works near the sea."

Dr Evans is particularly keen for people to join in the charity's 2006 National Whale and Dolphin Watch which takes place from August 12-20 throughout the UK. Anyone can take part if they are near the coast during that week, either by joining experienced observers at key look-out points or simply by recording their own sightings and sending them in.

Sea Watch uses the information gathered during the National Whale and Dolphin Watch to aid its research into marine mammal numbers and the effects of rising sea temperatures, over-fishing and pollution. Last year's event produced 576 sightings, including a group of six fin whales – the largest group ever seen in British waters.

Humpback whales and fin whales have already been recorded this year by observers in Scotland and the Irish Republic.

Times, dates and details of local co-ordinators will be published shortly on the Sea Watch website www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk where you can also find a guide to identifying whale and dolphin species.

National Whale and Dolphin Watch is sponsored by British Gas, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

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